A WORKINGMAN'S IDEAS OF CONSCRIPTION

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WE, as a nation, are on the eve of another Conscription. The President, our acknowledged chief, has issued his call for three hundred thousand men, to be furnished if possible by volunteering; if not by that means, then at a specified time the terrible wheel of fate, upon whose capricious turning the happiness of thousands will be forever wrecked; and the future of others, at present unable to appreciate their condition, will be entirely changed for the worse. Is it any wonder that men, unable to avert the calamity, should fear the rendering of the unalterable verdict of that dread oracle? Or that the fond and tender mother, surrounded by her little ones, whose very support of bread depends upon the husband and father being spared to them, should spend sleepless nights and sorrowful days, with a heart made despondent by her forebodings? Nor yet is it strange, that in view of the imminent danger threatened by these dire calamities, that husband and wife, father, mother and children, should cry aloud against the enforcement of the terrible hazard. And in a popular Government such as ours, it is not strange that "the outs" should make use of the miseries entailed by the conscription to secure their own elevation to power, by the displacement of those by whom the obnoxious measure was authorized.

But amid all the confusion incident to such a National necessity, and the excitement very naturally and properly attendant upon such an event, it is well to pause a moment, to consider whether such an undesirable event could be avoided, or if it is not the natural result of possessing a Government. What is the condition of mankind where no Government exists? Property is unknown, and human life is as little regarded as the life of animals among beasts of the forests; but where we find Government, the more

stable and powerful, the greater the security of life, and respect, and protection given to property. If the Government protects the lives and property of its people as a whole, it has an indisputable right to command that which it protects, if necessary to maintain itself, else it would be powerless for the very mission it has to fill; and in the case of our present National struggle, the power to conscript is more needed than in a foreign war, as this is a direct attempt to *destroy* the Government by force of arms. Had the seceding States made a single effort to obtain a separation, in a similar manner to that in which the Constitution was formed, that was by a Convention of all the States, the subject would then have assumed a different phase before the friends of self government at home, and the ruling powers abroad. But the granting to the minority, or *even to the majority*, the privilege to destroy without consultation, a contract made with the consent of all, is at once subversive of all Government, either popular or absolute. And if essential to sustain the authority of the Government, as decided by the people, in the manner prescribed by the Constitution, then that Government should possess, and of right does possess, the power to summon to its support every man, who in times of peace and prosperity shares its protection, be he either native or adopted citizen, or an alien resident.

But, desiring as all considerate rulers should, to avoid as much misery as possible in filling the ranks of armies, the majority of nations allow so many as desire to volunteer, and resort to conscription only to fill the deficiency. By this mode in this country, recruiting has not been so productive of terrors as in many others. But there is a limit to the ability of a people to furnish men in that manner; and we fear we have nearly, if not quite reached that point, and now we, too, are compelled to resort to the more objectionable method. The subject now to be considered is, not "how to avoid the conscription," but how to make it productive of as little evil to the community at large as possible.

Our present law seems to have been framed to attain just the reverse of that, or to create as little good as possible. In regulating the law by which the conscription is to be governed, our rulers should rise above the muddy waters of politics and the fumes of bar-room logic, and take a comprehensive view of the vast people for whom they legislate. By so doing, they would discover the community divided and sub-divided into classes; but for their purpose four general divisions would suffice; first: the all-essential class, without which the nation could not exist, "the producers." This class should receive, upon all questions, the first consideration. Second, "the non-producers." This class can always, and at all times be spared without detriment to the community, and with advantage to the great producing class. The two classes should be sub-divided into first, men with families, and second, men without families. Having reduced each man to his true standing in community, the conscription should be brought to bear upon the classes, beginning with that class of the least use to society, and if that became exhausted, then take next in order, and so on.

This brings us to the consideration of the relative value of the divisions; as the divisions have been made so clear that their value is almost self-evident, we will waste but few words in arranging them.

The first man in importance to the community is the man who, by his labor, supports his family; he is adding to the wealth of the world by his daily labor. With the proceeds of that labor he is rearing a family of children, who, in due course of time, will take his place, and profiting by his example, will, in all probability, be industrious and contented citizens, satisfied to earn their daily bread by honest toil, as their father before them did. The loss of that man is a grievous loss to the community, for it not only loses the value of his productions, but that family must needs be supported from the common fund; and that family having lost its head, must be scattered, losing the holy influence of the *home* cir-

cle; its different members arrive at mature years, with no well-conceived ideas of their duty to society and themselves, or, perhaps, in a condition that society would be the gainer, had they never lived to disgrace their race.

The second class in importance is the producer without a family; his employed labor is valuable to society; his example for industry to the rising generation, is not without its effect.

The third class are the non-producers, with families; as heads of families, they are simply useful in enforcing authority. They produce nothing, therefore their families would not miss their support; their withdrawal from the circle of acquaintances would be productive only of misery through absence to their family circle; and acute as that might be, it would be more imaginary than real.

The fourth and last class, and, we had almost written least useful, entirely useless class, are the non-producing men without families. If there be a useless animal walking this earth in the shape of mankind, it certainly is a man who labors not with hand or head, and to whom no one looks for support or example, whose only mission seems to be sauntering through life as he saunters through our busy streets. The hours of the day are a burden to him, and he a burden to society; and yet how many scores of thousands of this class are this day enjoying the protection of the Government, and rendering naught in return. They labor not to return aught for the food that nourishes them; they are not burdened with the cares of a family who might in future be of some advantage to society, but they are, in every sense of the word, useless. And yet these drones in the hive of the world stand the same chance as the most valuable class in the lottery of life or death as controlled by the conscription.

We trust our members of Congress will be able to see this matter in its true light ere the fatal wheel commences its unalterable announcements.

As a suggestion that would tend to promote volunteering, we would repeat the sentiments of an article we published some time since on this subject. That is, after having classified the citizens so that the enforcement of the conscription would be productive of as little evil as possible, then announce that if not filled by volunteers by a given date, that a draft would be made, and *no drafted man would be allowed to furnish a substitute.* That decision, with five hundred dollars bounty by Government, would fill the present call within one month. Men who now are held by substitute brokers in hopes of *future premiums as substitutes*, would at once be put forward to secure the bounty rather than lose sales.

The above is from *Fincher's Trades' Review*, the National Organ of the Producing Classes, published at Philadelphia, Pa.